

HOW TO MAKE PREVENTION MORE POWERFUL

Researchers across the country are investigating what works in substance abuse prevention and sharing their findings. From them, prevention practitioners can select prevention programs and strategies that will help reduce the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs among youth. The following offers insight into what research tells us works and what doesn't work.

Effective Strategies

Matching prevention programs and strategies with the needs of the community is effective. This process, comprehensive prevention program planning, involves answering specific questions about what is happening in the community.

Take action! Collect information about what's happening in your community. Find out what risk factors are impacting youth in the community and what prevention services youth are already receiving. This process will help to identify the gaps in services and help to identify partners in the community.

Prevention should be comprehensive and include multiple activities, such as information dissemination, prevention education, alternative activities, and problem identification and referral. Involving multiple members of the community in the prevention efforts and targeting efforts toward the community as a whole (such as implementing policy changes) are also crucial in changing community norms.

Take action! Ensure that many different strategies are used in the community to prevent substance abuse. Work with other prevention providers in the community to ensure that prevention services reach youth and families in various ways and across the years.

Targeting efforts toward youth with varying needs in a variety of settings can help to reach all youth.

Take action! Reach all youth and families within schools, community centers, churches and other community gatherings with prevention messages. Additionally, identify and provide services to youth identified at-risk and youth already experimenting with drug use.

Prevention programs and activities that match the gender, developmental and cultural characteristics of the youth served are more effective than those that don't consider these factors.

Take action! When selecting programs, determine if the program has been evaluated with specific age groups and with specific ethnic groups. Match this information with the youth receiving services. When using or selecting a program look at the program materials to determine the age group, gender and cultural groups that fit the materials. Determine if the materials can or should be modified.

Setting concrete goals for prevention programs helps planners to select the best programs or strategies and to measure success.

Take action! Set concrete goals for your agency. For example, 25 parents in the community will receive family management training focused on communicating clear guidelines to their children, monitoring their children's activities, and administering reasonable consequences. Research shows that parents who practice these skills have children who are less likely to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Ineffective Strategies

Some highly publicized programs have been shown to be ineffective.

Take action! Investigate research about the prevention programs you would like to select to find out what the research shows about program effectiveness.

"One-shot deals," such as hiring a motivational speaker or holding a drug-free dance, are ineffective as prevention strategies when used alone.

The following strategies are largely ineffective when used in isolation:

- "information dissemination" approaches that teach primarily about drugs and their effects
- "fear arousal" approaches that emphasize the risks associated with tobacco, alcohol, or drug use
- "moral appeal" approaches that teach students about the evils of use
- "affective education" programs that focus on building self-esteem, responsible decision making, and interpersonal growth

Recreational and cultural activities, known generically as "alternative activities," often are regarded as attractive enhancements or the "hook" that attracts youth participants. Other activities, such as skills training, are more essential components of prevention programming.

Take action! Select programs and strategies that reach youth more than once. Ideally, youth should have exposure to prevention programs and strategies throughout their developmental years in a variety of settings.

This brochure offers only a few tips from the vast information available about effective prevention programs and strategies. Learn more about the action items above and other prevention strategies that protect youth by contacting:

- Oregon Department of Human Services, Mental Health and Addiction Services, (503) 945-5763, or visit <http://www.oadap.hr.state.or.us/>
- Oregon Prevention and Treatment Resource Clearinghouse, (503) 373-1322, x222
- The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's Western Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies, (888) 734-7476, or visit <http://www.westcapt.org/>



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